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The political and religious dynamics of the *Mawlid al-nabawī* in Mandatory Palestine

ABSTRACT :

The politicization of the Nabi Musa festival during the Palestine Mandate is a well-known fact, yet other Arab Palestinian festivals knew a similar transformation in the same context. Such was the case of the *Mawlid al-nabawī* (birthday of the Prophet Muhammad). Arab nationalists meant it to evolve into a communal festival for all the Arabs of Palestine. Yet, for mainly denominational, geographical and political reasons, the attempt met with diverse success throughout the territory of the Palestine Mandate.

Attendance to public festivities remained decidedly Muslim in character. Repeated appeals to Christian participation were of little avail. Yet the attempts to include Christian Arabs in the festival throw light on Arab nationalist ideologies in Palestine at the time : from that point of view, the Prophet Muhammad stands out as an axiological inspiration, regardless of denominational boundaries.

In 1937, political mobilization on the occasion of the *Mawlid al-nabawī* peaked. Yet even then, attendance was greatest in Gaza and Acre, places where the festival was traditionally important. Furthermore, the degree of mobilization, varying from place to place, seems to reflect the influence of the main Arab Palestinian factions, whose rivalry was reaching a climax in the late 1930s.

In the issue of May 21st 1937 of the Palestinian Arab newspaper *Filastīn*, on the eve of the *Mawlid al-nabawī* (the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad, hereafter referred to as *Mawlid*), one of the editorialists complained that the director of the Department of Education of the Palestine Mandate had forbidden Arab children from taking part in the festivals linked to the occasion which were taking place. The *Mawlid* was an official holiday and, as the schools were to be closed, schoolchildren were to be left to the care of their parents. Given this, the journalist asked, what did the director think he was doing, meddling in the private lives of families? He further stated that

“ The Prophet's birthday is the equivalent of the Christmas holiday for the English, and we leave it to the Director of the Department of Education to imagine what would ensue if someone were to forbid schoolchildren in England from taking part in Christmas and its festivities; we wonder what the goal of such a man would be. “

Indeed, considering that no Arab in Palestine would prevent the said Director from sending his own children to church on Christmas Eve, the author was in a good position to question the purpose of the measure. He concluded by stating that it was the religious and patriotic [*waṭanī*] duty for Muslim as well as Christian schoolchildren to take part in themⁱ.

The comparison between the *Mawlid*, which was the occasion of conferences and rallies with clear political undertones among the Arab community in Palestine, and Christmas, mostly a family holiday, may seem less than apt; the details of the anecdote raise a number of questions about the meaning of the *Mawlid* e.g. what actually is a religious festival that requires attendance for both Muslims and Christians? While the general religious nature of the festival may be obvious, what made it "patriotic", and what did "patriotic" mean in a colonized and conflict-ridden country such as Palestine? In addition, how big was the festival actually becoming, such that its importance justified such a prohibition? It is not sufficient to point out that May 1937 was a brief moment of calm in the midst of three years of civil revolt by the Palestinian Arab population, and that the British authorities were wary of popular religious gatherings that might be used to express political discontent. Whatever misgivings the administration may have had as to the state of law and order during the festivals, these were not altogether cancelled. The dynamics of festivals may be saturated with politics at times, but there is much more to them than sheer instrumentality. While there were definite declarations, focusing on the potential that mobilizations throughout Palestine on that holiday might help foster a Palestinian Arab national festival, the *Mawlid* was never meant to be something akin to the Quatorze-Juillet, the Fourth of July. Establishing a national festival, I would argue, has to do with national sociability and the presence of a national idea throughout a territory; in the accounts of the *Mawlid*, there is, however, an ever-present tension between national aims and diverse forms of parochialism – especially localism and distinctions between Muslims and Christians, as well as factionalism. In the realms of intellectual debate, at conferences, and in the pressⁱⁱ, there was a Palestinian Arab national idea : this was evident in the talk about the *Mawlid*, which usually went on for more than one week. Yet it is questionable as to whether this translated

into the actual practice of those who attended the festival.

The *Mawlid* in Palestine : an Ottoman national festival in a religion-loaded calendar

Of all the religious festivals in Palestine, of which there are many, the *Mawlid* was one of the most officially important holidays of the calendar, prior to the Mandate, and was celebrated with due pomp on account of this factⁱⁱⁱ. While it had been celebrated at the court of the sultans since the late sixteenth century, it only became a national festival of the Ottoman Empire in 1910^{iv}; this event, in the aftermath of the Ottoman revolution of 1908-1909, gave the festival a clear political undertone. The Haifa-based newspaper, *Al-Karmil*, began its front-page column on the *Mawlid* on September, 9th, 1927, by stating that the festival reminded Muslims of the reinstatement of the Ottoman constitution after the Ottoman revolution, and of Sultan Mehmed V Reşad (1909-1918) as a symbol of that period^v. By that token, the *Mawlid* was a reminder of a rather liberal era. Also, it lost some of its religious significance; its official nature as a national Ottoman festival engulfed all Ottoman subjects, Muslims, Christians and Jews alike.

In this way, the *Mawlid* followed a pattern which was common in the region, not only in Palestine, by which religious festivals had the ability to cross religious boundaries. Such was the case with the Nabi Rubin festival near Jaffa and the Mar Elias in Haifa. Even the outwardly competing festivals of the Oriental Christian Easter in Jerusalem and Nabi Musa, which drew Muslims from Jerusalem, Hebron and Nablus to a shrine near Jericho during Holy week, had, by the late nineteenth century, become a common holiday framework, whose political economy was based on the fact that hordes of pilgrims arrived in Jerusalem during that period. They had to be housed somewhere and, because of a lack of hotels, some of the houses vacated by their owners, who were away during Nabi Musa, were rented out^{vi}.

The official status of the *Mawlid* continued during the Mandate years, with organizers banking on it as a vehicle for promoting other events, such as the reopening of the Al-Aqsa mosque

after costly repair works in 1928^{vii} and the opening of the Arab Fair of Jerusalem in 1933^{viii}. On the other hand, judging from the press, while Muslims and Christians predominantly identified as an Arab community throughout the Mandate, plans to use the *Mawlid* as a common interreligious event and national festival appear to have waned after only a few years.

“Holiday and mourning in one day “

Before it became a festival with a national Arab character, falling within the bi-communitarian framework that prevailed throughout the British Mandate, the *Mawlid* had already turned out to be an occasion for protest against the goals of the British administration, as well as the Zionist organizations. In 1921, the festival took place on November 2nd, which was also the fourth anniversary of the Balfour declaration. Prior to the holiday, an editorialist for *Filasṭīn* had described it as a “holiday and mourning in one day “, and wondered if people would “rejoice for the festival or lament the memory of that black and cursed day “^{ix}. In the aftermath of the holiday, the same newspaper viewed the results in clearly political terms, with Muslims and Christians alike abandoning work to such an extent that it suggested a clear mobilization against the implementation policy linked to the Balfour declaration^x.

It is, therefore, not surprising that Jews did not participate in the *Mawlid* throughout the Mandate; there was a clear political twist to the festival from the very outset, more so than for other festivals, which could become politicized at times and yet still count on Jewish attendance, e.g. the pilgrimage of Nabī Rūbīn, near Jaffa. On top of that, Zionist organizations were creating secular, union-based or party-based festivals, which aroused suspicion among the Palestinian Arab community. A report in *Filasṭīn* in 1937, based on a description in the Hebrew newspaper *HaBoker*, of a festival at the Histadrut school in Hadera, decries it as communist in character, involving as it did the unfurling of the red flag and anti-capitalist discourse^{xi}. Suspicion of hidden communistic agendas within the Zionist left was common in the Palestinian Arab press, so such a report seems to me to be representative of the mindset of the Palestinian Arab public. The Yishuv was also engaged

in promoting Jewish festivals such as Purim, which had existed in places such as Jerusalem prior to World War I, as national Jewish festivals.

A national festival for Muslims and Christians?

The desire to make use of the *Mawlid* as a national festival for the Arab population of Palestine stemmed from the difficulty in finding an event which would provide a common starting point for all of the Arab population of Palestine. There was a limited choice other than the religious festivals when considering the holidays of the majority religion, Islam. The *Mawlid* was among the selected festivals, along with the (Muslim) Nabi Musa pilgrimage, which was followed by a few Christian intellectuals as early as 1919. Yet the idea that these festivals were associated with the majority and not the whole of the Palestinian Arab people was to linger; a discourse was to evolve from this consideration, which aimed at establishing an historical justification in the eyes of the Christian population for the leading part which it was invited to take in the festival.

In the year 1920, a Muslim-Christian pattern emerged in the organization of the *Mawlid*; efforts, supported by *Al-Karmil*, were made to "make the birthday of the Prophet a national Arab festival in which Christian and Muslim Arabs would take part"^{xii}. In *Filasṭīn*, whose owner was a Christian (as was *Al-Karmil*'s, for that matter) and which maintained a distinctly Greek orthodox character through articles about the Orthodox denomination in Palestine, efforts to achieve this were made in a more subtle way. Announcing the *Mawlid* for 1921, the newspaper first states that "our Muslim brothers "are about to hold the festival but that leaders of both religions have decided to turn it into an Arab gathering, and hence clearly to use it as a display of force against the policy of the British and the implementation of the Balfour declaration"^{xiii}. The *Mawlid* was clearly identified as the festival of one religion, Islam, but, on an annual basis, Christians were invited to cross what were – and were meant to remain – definite religious boundaries.

Over the years, however, references to the Muslim-Christian nature of the festival decreased

in number, though they resurfaced now and again. With the violent event of September 1929, and throughout the 1930s, the *Mawlid* became a focus of popular protest. At the same time, it was increasingly construed in a manner that superseded purely Islamic definitions and was presented to Christians in a way which encouraged them, as Arabs, to take part in the festival.

As the crisis surrounding the Western wall unfolded throughout 1928 and 1929, most religious festivals in the Palestinian Arab community took on a stronger political meaning^{xiv}, as did the *Mawlid*. On the day of the festival, on August, 17th, 1929, a 2, 000-strong demonstration took place at the Haram al-Sharif, adding pressure on a situation that would end in riots in the following months^{xv}. The following year, the *Mawlid* took on a renewed political meaning. The British authorities had forbidden demonstrations in remembrance, forty days after their death, of the Arabs executed for their participation in the September 1929 riots; gatherings in mosques, to listen to parts the Prophet Muhammad's life story, (*quṣṣah*), relating to his birth, were used as a substitute for the forty days ceremony^{xvi}.

Not everywhere was it the case that the *Mawlid* of 1930 was strongly politicized; a description of the holiday in Majdal, in *Filasṭīn*, reveals fairly staid ceremonies, taking place as usual, with recitations of the *quṣṣah* and the reading of extracts of the life of the Prophet written by the medieval historian al-Ya'qūbī^{xvii}. However, this may have been misleading; in Qalqilya, people gathered in the mosque in the usual manner, with children singing *Mawlid* songs and the *ṣayḥ* Aḥmad al-Ḥaṭīb reading nothing but the *quṣṣah* of the Prophet. However, the report in *Filasṭīn* adds that the *ṣayḥ* refrained from engaging in patriotic discourse as there were spies in the audience^{xviii}. At any rate, the British authorities were anxious that any new religious festival should not degenerate again into a full-scale confrontation between the Jewish and Arab communities. In Haifa, the festivities organized by the Young Muslims Association were attended by many guests, as well as numerous soldiers and policemen, who were positioned next to the gate of the association's premises. The reporter reflected on the purpose of such a display of force at a religious festival attended by only one religious community, and therefore unlikely to evolve into a fight

between communities^{xix}. This was stretching the truth about the significance of the *Mawlid* to some extent , but the tough behavior of the British authorities seems to have caused resentment on the part of the Palestinian Muslims rather than to have appeased the situation.

While the *Mawlid* in Haifa – and probably in most other places as well – was only attended by Muslims, there were renewed demonstrations of Muslim-Christian solidarity that year. In Bethlehem, for instance, the Bethlehem Youth Club, a Christian association usually focused on its local community activities, went out of its way to offer, in the columns of *Filasṭīn*, its congratulations to all Palestinian Muslims on the occasion of the festival, and to wish the Arab nation happiness and freedom^{xx}. There were, as well, several articles published in the following years, explaining why the *Mawlid* mattered to Muslims as well as Arabs in general – to wit, Christian Arabs – and should, therefore, be a holiday for all. Taking all this into consideration, I do not feel that Christian-Muslim unity materialized as a result of involvement in the festival. On the other hand, part of the significance of the *Mawlid* was external to the actual festival; along with the inner dynamic of the festival, witnessed by its participants, there was the additional dynamic of the public debate surrounding the *Mawlid*. The weeks before and after the holiday, with a growing number of press articles relating to its program and details, were moments during which Christian-Muslim relations were redefined, to be fitted into the wider framework of Arab nationalism.

Arab nationalism as seen through the *Mawlid* : an axiological nationalism

Every year, articles about the *Mawlid* fell into two main categories; details about festival events, and columns about the significance of the *Mawlid* : significance in the light of the bloody events from 1929 onwards, as discussed earlier; the significance for men and women respectively, as exemplified by a few articles in the 1940s^{xxi}; and, mostly, the significance for Muslims and Christians.

The latter articles developed two main themes, each one historical in nature. Firstly, the division of Muslims and Christians was said to have been an invention formulated by the numerous occupiers which had been in power after the heyday of Arab dominance under the Umayyad and the early Abbassid caliphs. For all the occupiers, not only for the British, the division of Arabs was a means of exerting their domination^{xxii}. The point here is not to identify a form of ideological history, but to see how an ideology operates in practice : in the case of Arab nationalism, it functioned through an historical narrative.

The second point, formulated again and again in the nationalist newspaper *Al-Karmil*, was a call to revive the morality that had prevailed among the Arabs after the prophecy of Muhammad. The main idea was that the Prophet of Islam had saved the Arabs from their moral ignorance and given them, as one author argued, strict ethics, which had, alas, dwindled away over the centuries^{xxiii}; yet, another writer stated that their golden age had allowed them to achieve all kinds of greatness, more than those about which the Jews could boast^{xxiv}.

Those historical articles did not stop at the description of the former glory of the Arabs in order to justify their political stance against Zionism; they had a contemporary political content, based on an assertion of the laws of history; the Arabs had been great when they had been guided, not by justice or by a sense of their strength, but by strong and fine *mores* on which they had built a civilization. Through his teachings, Muhammad had instilled a form of legality or of legitimacy (*šarī'ah*) – more accurately, a knowledge of practical reason in the Kantian sense – with had

affected the realms of morality, language and literature, government, science, economy, and so on^{xxv}.

Thus, Arab nationalism was defined as an axiological nationalism, a nationalism based on values; fine morals and a certain, cultural form of decency transmitted from one generation to the next. Indeed, it is not sufficient to describe it as cultural nationalism, a vague term engulfing both a cultural set of practices along with its rationale, and political uses of national heritagemuseified. There is not much “heritage “ and patrimonial work in the Palestinian Arab nationalism of the 1920s-1930s, when compared with the Palestinian national movement after the 1970s. On the other hand, there was a lot in it which was common to all the Arab population of Palestine, who shared the same standards of decency, regardless of religion.

What was the conclusion to which those historical developments pointed? As for *Al-Karmil*, the Arabs had to be thankful for his gift of a glorious civilization, whose influence they were still experiencing. This was clear for Muslims, the newspaper's frontpage editorialist said in July 1932, and they expressed their gratefulness through the *Mawlid*. Yet the idea ought to have been clear to all Arabs – again, read “Christians” –, who should therefore join in the festival^{xxvi}. This last article, published in a Haifa-based newspaper, took on a special meaning that very summer, as the festival of the *Mawlid* almost coincided with the main popular festival of that town, the pilgrimage of Mār Ilyās [Saint Elijah] to the Carmelite convent on Mount Carmel. There was an element of competition between the two festivals, which was fueled by the decision of the British railroad authorities to facilitate transportation to the big gathering organized in Acre for the *Mawlid*^{xxvii}. The festival lasted for three days, drawing tens of thousands of people. In addition to the traditional recitation of the *quṣṣah* of the Prophet, participants were invited to play games, sing and dance the *dabkah*^{xxviii}. The success of the festival was not just in relation to politics and religion, but also in relation to the fun element, especially once it reached such large dimensions.

A mostly Northern festival

The fact that the main gathering in 1932 should have taken place in Acre was not a coincidence. The town gave special importance to the *Mawlid* throughout the period of the Mandate, and there were also geographical reasons for the importance of the festival in the northern towns of Palestine in general. In terms of its importance, the *Mawlid* was second only to the Nabi Musa festival, which traditionally drew crowds from Jerusalem, Hebron and Nablus. The pilgrimage to Nabi Musa was patronized by the main Palestinian Arab political leader of the Mandate years, the mufti of Jerusalem Ḥājj Amīn al-Husseini, head of the Supreme Muslim Council, the body which was responsible for supervising Islamic cultural foundations and organization all over Palestine. This gave him the financial means to promote various religious festivals, including the *Mawlid*^{xxix}, partly as a way of promoting political and cultural mobilization; , but however, Nabi Musa remained as the main means of demonstrating his influence.

Yet Nabi Musa, situated as it was between Jericho and the Dead Sea, was a pretty distant destination for inhabitants of the Northern part of Palestine and the British authorities were wary of such a religious festival expanding its geographical influence. Practical reasons, therefore, prevented Northerners from attending the festival. Distance and political circumstances converged and prompted the nationalist organizations of Northern Palestine to devise an occasion of their own for mobilizing around a festival; this turned out to be the *Mawlid*.

The responsibility for organizing the *Mawlid* in the North was mostly assumed by religious-political groups, especially the Young Muslim Association, powerful in Haifa (where one of its prominent members was the Syrian-born militant 'Izz al-Dīn al-Qassām) and Acre (where one of its most active members was the lawyer and later first chairman of the PLO, Aḥmad Šuqayrī). The Young Muslim Association was a political ally of the mufti of Jerusalem, but it was autonomous in its activities.

One of those activities was the organization of the *Mawlid* : the Young Muslim Association hosted conferences, organized the gathering of the people and the reading of the life of the Prophet

in the mosques and the ensuing marches through the towns, and took responsibility for part of the decorations of the city. In Acre, the Association was the main driving force behind ensuring that the festival for the *Mawlid* took on its unusually large scale character^{xxx}.

The *Mawlid* was of varying importance from place to place, in accordance with local traditions, in spite of the political movement towards transforming it into a "patriotic national" festival^{xxxii}: "national" in as much as it was a festival for all Arabs, and "patriotic" as it showed the vitality of the Arab community within the territorial framework of the British Mandate of Palestine. Yet, the real scale of the *Mawlid* was determined by the size and history of an individual town and its surroundings. Sometimes, the local festival, as in the case of a village such as Zakariyā, in the Jerusalem area, was characterized by "corrupted" practices (as yet un-detailed), as described and criticized by a journalist from *Filasṭīn* in 1932^{xxxiii}.

At stake was the issue of religious reform, as well as the desire of the Muslim leaders to separate popular religion from official celebrations, especially in the countryside where it was known to be a dominant cultural feature. In Palestine, a country studded with very popular local saints and pilgrimages, popular festivals did not disappear, although they did not remain immune to reformist influences, especially as the Supreme Muslim Council was actively promoting some of them in order to control them more effectively^{xxxiv}. For instance, a popular festival in Gaza was the pilgrimage of *al-sayyid* Hāšim, referring to the Prophet's grand-father's tomb near the city. It took place during the week prior to the *Mawlid*, which, as an immediate follow-up to a prior local festival, was more popular than in nearby Majdal^{xxxv}. While partisans of "orthodox" Islam roundly criticized the pilgrimage of *al-sayyid* Hāšim as a popular form of religiosity^{xxxvi}, the *Mawlid* itself was supported by the highest Islamic authorities in the land. In Gaza, the *Mawlid* was a success thanks to popular religion.

The *Mawlid* was a festival whose projected character was national, yet whose success depended on geography and the characteristics of local piety. With the Arab revolt starting in 1936, national mobilization around the *Mawlid* went up a degree, but not everywhere. Uri Kupferschmidt

describes the 1936 *Mawlid* as a time of large scales demonstration, with the sermons pronounced at the Al-Aqsa mosque being transmitted over the radio and the mufti of Jerusalem taking part in its organization^{xxxvi}, yet in some towns, such as Haifa, ceremonies at the mosques were reduced to a minimum and festivities were cancelled "due to the situation "^{xxxvii}. Were festivities replaced by demonstrations ? I do not know. Yet it seems likely that the announcement in the newspaper that festivities were cancelled had a demobilizing effect. On the contrary, the *Mawlid* of 1937 was meant to demonstrate political muscle and draw a great number of participants, in spite of the above-mentioned efforts to curtail it on the part of the British authorities.

Mobilization for the *Mawlid* of 1937

The *Mawlid* of 1937 took place in the context of appeasement and temporary calm in the midst of the Arab revolt, before the publication of the Peel plan in July 1937, which proposed the division of Palestine into two states with a population transfer between them, and the British crackdown on the mufti of Jerusalem and the Supreme Muslim Council in the autumn of the same year. After a wave of repression by the mandatory power in April 1937, the mufti of Jerusalem decided to show his capacity to mobilize, first by organizing the boycott of the ceremonies for the crowning of George VI and then by giving the *Mawlid* in Jerusalem special importance. Small triumphal arches were erected and flags were unfurled throughout the Old City. The importance of that year's *Mawlid* was not limited to Jerusalem, however, and in most towns special efforts at public decoration and organization were made, which showed adhesion to the mufti's agenda. At the same time, the rivalry between the mufti of Jerusalem and the Hashemite Emir Abdallah of Transjordan, aimed at gaining relative influence in Palestine, was reaching an all-time high^{xxxviii}, to the extent that some political features of the *Mawlid*, here and there, could be read as anti-Hashemite rather than as anti-British or anti-Zionist in character. Towns with little mobilization were often towns with an important Christian population, such as Nazareth, where the only activity

for the *Mawlid* was to be the reception of visitors at the religious courthouse on the morning of the second day of the festival. Yet in other towns, there might be a degree of opposition to the mufti.

The festival was usually organized collectively by the political and religious organization, such as the Young Muslim Association in Ramlah, as well as local notables, such as the local branch of the Husseini family in Gaza, and the municipalities. The program of celebrations in a number of places not central to Palestinian politics showed a degree of preparation and decoration greater than in previous years. In most towns, festivities were to include the reading of the *quṣṣah* of the Prophet and a party on Friday night (Friday being the first day of the *Mawlid*). In Safed, however, the program was more directive, with a march through the town as a highlight. There, a march took on special signification, as the town was mixed in character, inhabited by Arabs and religious Jews alike. Such a demonstration was a way to “reclaim” the place.

Drawing as many people as possible into visible gatherings was a goal in itself; to this end, in Majdal, the political organizations and the Worker's association sent invitation cards to all the residents of the town. In Ramlah, scout parades were planned to bring scout teams from the town as well as the schools of nearby al-'Abbāsiyyah, Yāzūr and Bayt Dajan, which meant that the parents of the scouts would also attend the festival^{xxxix}.

Overall, towns were mobilized in different ways for the *Mawlid*, greater mobilization showing greater political involvement. In Al-Lidd, near Ramlah, there were apparently few activities beyond the reading of the *quṣṣah* in the town's two mosques and a party organized by the municipality on Friday night. In Nablus, an effort was made to display decorations similar to those displayed in Jerusalem : lamps, small triumphal arches, Arab flags – which I take to mean the flag of the 1916 Arab revolution, which, during the Mandate, was used as the Pan-Arab flag and differed from the Palestinian flag (today the flag of the Palestinian Authority) in the arrangement of horizontal colours. An important number of visitors were expected in town for the festival. The same held true of Gaza, where streets, shops, coffee-shops and clubs were decorated for the occasion; a celebration would take place at the great al-'Umarī mosque with the usual reading, and a

party was to be held at the diwan of the Husseini family, the local branch of the family of the mufti and the most influential family of notables in Gaza. In this last case, it was transparent that the organization of the *Mawlid* illustrated the influence of the mufti of Jerusalem^{xl}.

More significant, and more surprising, were the forms and the degree of mobilization in Qalqīlyah. The *Mawlid* there was a festival of some importance prior to 1937. That year, however, preparations were intensive and began three days in advance, indicating a great degree of mobilization for the *Mawlid* in a fairly small size town. The decorations were mostly the same as those in Jerusalem, but along with the many Arab flags, a number of Saudi flags were also displayed. Given that Saudi wahhabism was hostile to the celebration of the person of Muhammad and banned the celebration of the *Mawlid*, this did not signify religious influence, but a solid political commitment; the display of Saudi flags was thought of in advance, not a spontaneous act, as might have been the case had they been waved during the festival. The mufti was on acceptable terms with the house of Saud, while there could hardly have been a sign more hostile to the emir of Transjordan than displaying the flag of the family which had ousted the Hashemite family from the Hejaz^{xli}.

Overall, the *Mawlid* of 1937 had a militant and triumphalist flavor. This goes some way to explaining why the British, after one year of strikes and violence, were loath to let the attendance swell by allowing children to take part in the festival. In addition, it seems obvious that the occasion was very politicized and nothing like a purely religious festival, let alone a family festival such as Christmas. Yet, with the amount of decorations, the parties and the scout parades in most places, I believe that this degree of organization showed that the *Mawlid* was becoming more than just a moment of mobilization for the Palestinian Arab population, remotely controlled by the Supreme Muslim Council or the Young Muslim Association. With talk of the festival continuing for one week or more in the newspapers, and toys and decorations being sold for the occasion, something like a "Mawlid spirit" was in evidence.

Conclusion :

In retrospect, the prevention of children from attending the festivities of the *Mawlid* in 1937 was exceptional. Normally, restrictions on the celebrations or on the discourses held during attendance were self-imposed and determined by the organizers on account of the presence of the police. The British preferred to let religious festivals unfold naturally, but were ready to repress speeches that could be construed as incitement.

This led to a great degree of ambiguity in relation to defining the meaning of the *Mawlid*; when convenient, or rather when necessary vis-à-vis the mandatory power, the press would present the festival as purely religious. When possible, it would be promoted as a national and patriotic occasion, a way of demonstrating Palestinian Arab opposition to the British occupation and to Zionism, and of expressing a desire for a national Arab awareness. Yet, patriotism was also a way of deflecting official suspicions that the festival was becoming too politicized; it did not refer to an ideological agenda, but to a sense of civic responsibility, which the Mandate was supposed to be fostering, after all.

In order to formulate the *Mawlid* as a national and patriotic festival, proponents of the *Mawlid* had to make it inclusive, in order for the Christians to feel part of its spirit. Rhetorically, such a spirit could be justified through Arabness, defined by history and values common to both Muslims and Christians. In practice, Christians taking part in the *Mawlid* were few and far between.

An indication that there was a "*Mawlid* spirit" is, nonetheless, reflected in what became of the *Mawlid* after the suppression of the Supreme Muslim Council in 1937. In 1938, the festival would be reduced to readings at the mosques, for reasons which were euphemistically attributed to the economic crisis and not to the state of civil war evolving among the Palestinian Arab population or the disappearance of its main political outlet. Yet, during World War II, there were again intensive preparation for the festival at a local level. This induces me to relativize the importance of the Supreme Muslim Council, at least in relation to the development of this particular festival. As

late as January 1948, activities were being planned for the *Mawlid*, even though they were of a limited nature for that particular year.

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- ⁱ « Masā'il al-yawm – 'Īd al-mawlid al-nabawī wa-idārat al-ma'ārif » [Questions of the day – The *mawlid* festival and the Department of Education]. In *Filasṭīn* 3535/69 (21/05/1937) : 1.
- ⁱⁱ This paper is the result of a more general research on the *Mawlid* and religious festivals that drew crowds across denominational and religious boundaries in Palestine, from the late Ottoman period onwards. The present paper, concerned with the media coverage of those festivals in the Arab press, dwells more on the representations of the festival than on its actual practices.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Uri M. Kupferschmidt, *The Supreme Muslim Council. Islam under the British Mandate for Palestine*, 235.
- ^{iv} « Mawlid. », 886-887.
- ^v « Al-nabī al-'arabī wa'l-aḥlāq » [The Arab Prophet and morals]. In *Al-Karmil* 1251 (09/09/1927) : 1.
- ^{vi} On that issue, let me refer the reader to my article : Philippe Bourmaud, « Une Société Interconfessionnelle : Lieux Saints et Fêtes Religieuses en Palestine (XIXe Siècle – 1948), », *passim*.
- ^{vii} Uri M. Kupferschmidt, *The Supreme Muslim Council. Islam under the British Mandate for Palestine*, 234-235.
- ^{viii} « Al-Ma'raḍ al-'arabī fī'l-Quds » [The Arab fair in Jerusalem]. In *Filasṭīn* 2369/104 : 3.
- ^{ix} « Aḥbār maḥalliyyah – Al-'īd wa'l-ḥidād fī yawm wāḥid » [Local news – The holiday and the mourning in one day]. In *Filasṭīn* 426/67 (31/10/1922) : 3.
- ^x « Aḥbār maḥalliyyah – 'Īd al-mawlid al-nabawī al-karīm wa-dīkrā wa'd Balfūr » [Local news – The happy holiday of the Prophet's birthday and the memory of the Balfour declaration]. In *Filasṭīn* 527/68 (03/11/1922) : 2.
- ^{xi} « A'āduhum al-ṣuyū'iyyah ! » [Their communistic festivals !]. In *Filasṭīn* 3534/68 (20/05/1937) : 2.
- ^{xii} « Al-nabī al-'arabī wa'l-aḥlāq » [The Arab Prophet and morals]. In *Al-Karmil* 1251 (09/09/1927) : 1.
- ^{xiii} « Aḥbār maḥalliyyah. 'Īd al-mawlid al-nabawī » [Local news. The festival for the birthday of the Prophet.]. In *Filasṭīn* 431/64 (12/11/1921) : 3.
- ^{xiv} Uri M. Kupferschmidt, *The Supreme Muslim Council. Islam under the British Mandate for Palestine*, 230.
- ^{xv} *Ibid.*, 235.
- ^{xvi} « Rūḥ al-baḡdā' » [Spirit of hate]. In *Filasṭīn* 1505/125 (13/08/1930) : 1.
- ^{xvii} « Al-mawlid al-nabawī al-ṣarīf fī'l-Majdal » [The noble birthday of the Prophet in Majdal]. In *Filasṭīn* 1502/122 (09/08/1930).
- ^{xviii} « Risālat Qalqīlyah - Al-iḥtifāl bi'l-mawlid al-nabawī » [Letter from Qalqilya – The celebration of the birthday of the Prophet]. In *Filasṭīn* 1503/123 (10/08/1930) : 3.
- ^{xix} « Risālat Ḥayfā - Ḥaflah dīniyyah – Limā ma'nā ḥadihi'l-quwah ? » [Letter from Haifa – A religious feast – What does all that force mean ?]. In *Filasṭīn* 1503/123 (10/08/1930) : 3.
- ^{xx} « Risālat Bayt Laham – Dīkrā al-mawlid al-nabawī wa-nādī al-ṣabībah al-baytlaḥamiyyah » [Letter from Bethlehem – The Birthday of the Prophet and the Bethlehem Youth Club]. In *Filasṭīn* 1501/121 (08/08/1930) : 2.

- xxi « Šawt al-mar'ah fī... Yawm al-'urūbah al-'azīm » [The woman's voice about... the great day of the Arab nation]. In *Filasṭīn* 5952/301 (25/02/1945) : 2.
- xxii « Dīkrā mawlid sayyid Qurayš – Al-Nasarā wa'l-Muslimūn » [The birthday of the lord of the tribe of Quraysh – The Christians and the Muslims]. In *Al-Karmil* 1789 (02/08/1933) : 4.
- xxiii « Al-nabī al-'arabī wa'l-aḥlāq » [The Arab Prophet and morals]. In *Al-Karmil* 1251 (09/09/1927) : 1.
- xxiv « Al-mawlid al-nabawī - 'Aṣr al-'Arab al-ḡahabī – Muqābalah bayna majd al-'Arab wa-majd al-Yahūd wa-bayna mawqif al-ša'bayn al-yawm » [The birthday of the Prophet – The golden age of the Arabs – Comparison between the glory of the Arabs and of the Jews, and between the present situation of both people]. In *Al-Karmil* 1600 (25/07/1931) : 1.
- xxv « Al-nabī al-'arabī wa'l-aḥlāq » [The Arab Prophet and morals]. In *Al-Karmil* 1251 (09/09/1927) : 1.
- xxvi « Al-mawlid – Ayyuhā al-'Arab – Ayyuhā al-Muslimūn » [The birthday of the Prophet – For the Arabs – For the Muslims]. In *Al-Karmil* 1691 (16/07/1932) : 1.
- xxvii Philippe Bourmaud, « Une Société Interconfessionnelle : Lieux Saints et Fêtes Religieuses en Palestine (XIXe Siècle -1948), » 200-202.
- xxviii « Al-mawlid al-nabawī » [The birthday of the Prophet]. In *Al-Karmil* 1692 (20/07/1932) : 4.
- xxix Uri M. Kupferschmidt, *The Supreme Muslim Council. Islam under the British Mandate for Palestine*, 235.
- xxx « Al-mawlid al-nabawī » [The birthday of the Prophet]. In *Al-Karmil* 1692 (20/07/1932) 4; « Aḥbār maḥallīyyah » [Local news]. In *Filasṭīn* 1151/51 (28/08/1928) : 4; « Isti'dād 'Akkā li-yawm al-mawlid al-nabawī » [Preparations in Acre for the Birthday of the Prophet]. In *Filasṭīn* 2070/112 (12/07/1932) : 7.
- xxxi « Al-mawlid al-nabawī - 'Īd waṭanī qawmī » [The birthday of the Prophet – A patriotic, national festival]. In *Al-Karmil* (12/07/1933) : 4.
- xxxii « Risālat Zakariyā - Al-mawlid al-nabawī al-šarīf » [Letter from Zakariyā – The noble birthday of the Prophet]. In *Filasṭīn* 1505/125 (13/08/1930) : 4.
- xxxiii Uri M. Kupferschmidt, *The Supreme Muslim Council. Islam under the British Mandate for Palestine*, 231-234.
- xxxiv « Ġazzah (li-murāsīlīnā) – Mawsim al-sayyid Hāšim » [Gaza, from our correspondent – The pilgrimage of the sayyid Hāšim]. In *Filasṭīn* 1229/68 (20/08/1929) : 4; « Risālat Ġazzah – Mawsim al-sayyid Hāšim jadd al-nabī al-karīm » [Letter from Gaza – The pilgrimage of the sayyid Hāšim, grand-father of the noble Prophet]. In *Filasṭīn* 2070/112 (12/07/1932) : 7.
- xxxv Uri M. Kupferschmidt, *The Supreme Muslim Council. Islam under the British Mandate for Palestine*, 235, note n° 76.
- xxxvi *Ibid.*, 236 & note n° 82.
- xxxvii « Ilgā' al-mahrajānāt bi-'īd al-mawlid al-nabawī » [Cancellation of the celebrations for the birthday of the Prophet]. In *Filasṭīn* 3264/73 (28/05/1936) : 6.
- xxxviii Henry Laurens, *Histoire de la question de Palestine*, t. 2 : *Une Mission sacrée de civilisation*, 344-345.
- xxxix « Isti'dād al-buldān al-filasṭīniyyah li'l-mawlid al-nabawī – Al-naṣāṭ fī iqāmat al-zaynāt wa-tartīb al-mahrajānāt » [Preparation of the birthday of the Prophet in the Palestinian lands – Great activity in setting up the decoration and organizing the festivities]. In *Filasṭīn* 3535/69 (21/05/1937) : 2.
- xl *Ibid.*
- xli *Ibid.*